



Environmental Considerations as Part of the Military Decision-Making Process

By Mr. Albert M. Vargesco

It is not just about endangered species, cleaning up spills, or being in compliance! Operations and simulations confirm that environmental considerations include many areas that might be low on the commander's (and staff's) priority list, but still need to be considered as part of the military decision-making process (MDMP).

Consider the following scenario: U.S. deployed forces are about to conduct a deliberate river-crossing operation against a smart, determined but outnumbered, enemy. Multiple crossing sites are planned. One brigade combat team (BCT) will cross at a point in the river parallel to an underground petroleum pipeline. Not far away is an underground natural gas pipeline. Each one has exposed standpipes and valves on both sides of the river. The terrain is complex, with a mix of small built-up urban areas and rolling agricultural fields. Another BCT has a forward base established less than 1 kilometer away from a commercial phosphorus plant. A municipal power plant in the area of operations was destroyed by U.S. forces because the enemy was using it for hiding an antiaircraft battery. It is harvest season, and the farmers are trying to get their crops in before the rainy season starts. The U.S. mission is to destroy enemy forces, shore up the fledgling elected government and train



their forces, and stay on to conduct stability and reconstruction operations (SRO) along with nation building. Winning the hearts and minds of the local population is an important implied task. Another key implied task is to conduct the mission with minimal casualties, both U.S. and civilian.

This was the scenario facing the United States Army Maneuver Support Center (MANSCEN) (Engineer, Military Police, and Chemical Schools) Captain's Career Course Warfighter III in their culminating exercise at the MANSCEN Battle Lab. Their responsibility was to address the environmental considerations.

- Environmental considerations should be clearly identified during the MDMP and the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB). A thorough terrain analysis, to include identification of the existing infrastructure, would reveal that choosing a river-crossing site adjacent to these pipelines is not a good choice. These pipelines could be blown—either on purpose or by accidental artillery/mortar fires—and create a significant blast, illuminate the crossing sites, spill burning petroleum product in the river, and put the crossing at risk. Destruction of these pipelines would also have a significant adverse impact on the civilian population.

- Selecting a forward operating base so close to a commercial phosphorus plant is not a good idea in the interest of force health protection. The fumes from this plant could make Soldiers sick. If the plant were deliberately blown by the enemy, there could be significant loss of life (military and civilian) from toxic fumes carried downwind. The destruction of this plant would also adversely impact the farming community.
- Loss of the power plant may or may not affect combat operations, but in the aftermath of its destruction, a lot of time, money, and effort would be required to make it operational again. If destruction of the power plant is not absolutely necessary, it should not be targeted. The negative impacts of destroying the power plant should be weighed before the final decision is made to destroy it. There might be alternatives to reducing the enemy fire coming from the facility that do not require the plant's destruction.
- Since this is an agricultural area, there will be many feed stores in the area with agrochemicals present. These chemicals are easily made into explosive devices, which a determined and desperate enemy would employ. It would be an important priority in the offensive operation to secure these stores—to deny their use by the enemy and to protect them for future use by the agricultural community once combat ends.
- The farmlands, vineyards, orchards, and so on should be avoided to the extent that is militarily possible. Any follow-on SRO will be made simpler if the civilian population still has a means to make a living and stay employed. It might be necessary, as part of combat operations, to destroy some of the agriculture in the area, but the consequences would have to be addressed in the aftermath by the national government and the United States.

Other environmental considerations associated with military operations that can impact the operation include dust suppression, insect and/or vermin infestation, infectious-waste disposal, hazardous-waste disposal, and protection/preservation of historic, religious, and cultural sites.

For more information on environmental considerations during military operations, visit the United States Army Engineer School Directorate of Environmental Integration Web site at <www.wood.army.mil/dei>.



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